

Statement to the media

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Vigorous pro-choice protest stands strong in Kent

On June 9, a counter-rally brought out a large crowd of feminists and human rights supporters to support a Planned Parenthood clinic in Kent, Wash., against the anti-abortion group Patriot Prayer, led by Joey Gibson. Unionists, clinic defenders, socialists, LGBTQ activists, and anarchists outnumbered the anti-choice crowd six to one.

Says Gina Petry, Radical Women president who helped to plan the counter-rally: “We outlasted and outshouted the anti-abortionists, despite being pepper-sprayed by police who sided with the misogynists. Our side was invigorated by wide collaboration and the large turnout and vowed to continue to work together to stop the alt-right and white supremacist elements that Patriot Prayer attracts.”

The ad hoc coalition that organized the action issued a statement saying, “Emboldened by the Trump White House, Patriot Prayer and Joey Gibson’s U.S. Senate campaign have been accelerating their attacks on women and reproductive rights. They are the same bigots that have been appearing with increasing frequency from Washington to California. They bring with them violence, racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and Islamophobia.”

Organizers for reproductive freedom reported encounters with FBI and police that they described as intimidation. Before the action, FBI agents [visited](#) the homes of people associated with Radical Women and Seattle Clinic Defense. According to Seattle Clinic Defense member Ariel Hard, “FBI agents were trying to disrupt our planning and scare activists by going to their homes to question them. But we were not dissuaded.”

The morning of June 9 a large number of heavily armed law enforcement personnel showed up in riot gear, including police from Kent, Auburn, Renton and Tukwila, plus King County sheriffs. The police set up barricades on both sides of the street and established what they termed a “free speech zone” for Patriot Prayer directly in front of the clinic. Chicana activist and longtime clinic defender Christina López asserts, “The cops served as escorts across Planned Parenthood property for those very fanatics who are attempting to shut down the clinic. Then they brutally shoved those of us standing up for women’s rights across the street with long billy clubs and doused us with pepper spray.”

Freedom Socialist Party candidate for U.S. Senate Steve Hoffman, who is running for the same seat as Joey Gibson, was among the clinic defenders. He reports, “I was disgusted to see the police unleash pepper spray on unarmed community members standing up for the basic right of women to control their own bodies and lives.” Medics quickly came to the assistance of those who were injured by the debilitating chemical spray, including retired union carpenter Patrick Burns of Organized Workers for Labor Solidarity, who had to be taken away for treatment.

After this encounter, reproductive rights activists persisted with their demonstration until the right-wing protesters left. The 11 organizations in the ad hoc coalition gathered for what they termed a victory rally before dispersing.

Organizations who came together for the counter-protest include Seattle Clinic Defense, Radical Women, Party for Socialism and Liberation, *Seattle Gay News*, Freedom Socialist Party, Dyke Community Activists, Organized Workers for Labor Solidarity, ANSWER, Steve Hoffman Campaign for U.S. Senate, International Socialist Organization and Workers World Party.

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